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intercom

THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

ALTERNATE FORMS OF MEDIA

EXPAND YOUR CONTENT MEDIUMS

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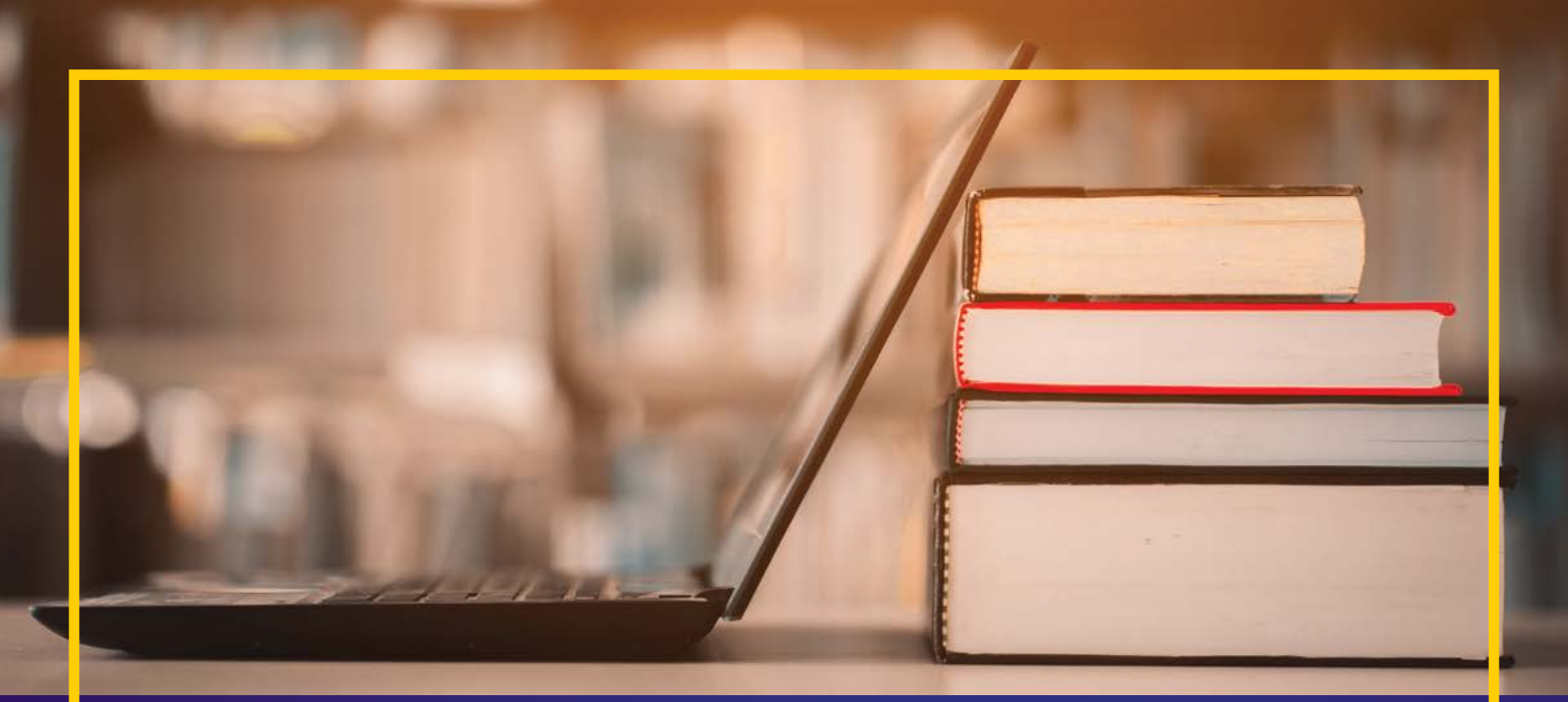

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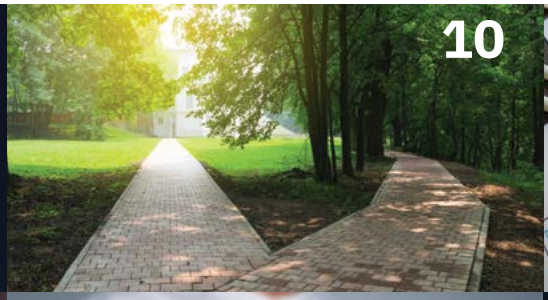

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intercom

Intercom, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, is published to provide practical examples and applications of technical communication that will promote its readers' professional development.

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A Note from the Editor

One of the best parts of this role is the access to interesting contributors who tell me all about the things that excite them. This issue is no exception.

This month, we're looking beyond documentation at alternate forms of media. From VR to apps, podcasting to video, what existing skills can we leverage and how can we approach things in new ways?

Some things I learned include:

- "Thinking beyond words allows us to embrace the entire language of VR and to think more like screenwriters and less like copywriters." – Andrea Zeller
- "Essential to any infographic is the *content*, which includes time frames and timelines, statistics, and references. And lastly are the facts and deductions that make up the *knowledge*." – Kelly Schrank
- "[App] reviews can provide specific, actionable information that can then be used to improve the user's experience." – Kristin Bivens and Candice Welhausen
- "Applying various DITA principles, such as content architecture, topic-based authoring, and minimalism, to the video production process has helped me develop and establish standards and streamline the content for video production and maintenance." – Sreeranjani Pattabiraman
- "[With DITA XML] you can use the same content you have been authoring for the traditional media, then publish a smart glasses-compatible version. There is no need to create separate content for XR — just use what you have!" – Hanna Heinonen
- "What can you showcase or market with a podcast? The simple answer is *marketing*, whether it's you, your team, or your company." – Ed Marsh

I hope you have as much fun exploring these topics as I did.

If you'd like to share your interesting knowledge with others, I welcome your submissions to *Intercom* — even if you've never written for a magazine before! Next up: translation and localization.
https://www.stc.org/intercom/editorial-calendar/ ■

Alisa Bonsignore
(she/her)

Statement of Ownership: There were 447 copies of INTERCOM published in September 2021. The average for the preceding 12 months was 424. The paid/requested outside-county mail subscriptions for the September 2021 issue were 403; the average for the preceding 12 months was 378. Total distribution for September 2021 was 407. The average for the preceding 12 months was 384. Eight (8) free copies of INTERCOM were distributed by mail in September 2021 and the average number of free copies distributed during the preceding 12 months was 48. Forty (40) copies of INTERCOM were not distributed in September 2021, and the average number of copies not distributed during the preceding 12 months was 50. The percent paid/requested circulation in September 2021 was 97 percent; for the preceding 12 months, percent paid/requested circulation was 94 percent.

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Writing Beyond the Screen: Designing User Experiences for VR

By Andrea Zeller

Thinking beyond words allows us to embrace the entire language of virtual reality and to think more like screenwriters and less like copywriters

"Let's jump into VR for a quick workout!"

That's the text message I sent to my friend and colleague Jen a few Sunday mornings ago. I then put on my Quest 2 virtual reality (VR) headset and materialized onto the surface of Mars. Seconds later, my fitness coach, Leanne, showed up in front of me. As she eased me into my boxing lesson, it felt as if she were actually there with me in the same virtual space. I could also hear Jen's voice since we were taking the same class. Leanne gave me pointers as I squatted and struck targets as they came flying toward me. After 30 minutes, we had worked up a good sweat.

When I first started crafting augmented reality (AR)/VR experiences nearly six years ago, I never imagined that I'd be spending my Sunday mornings learning how to box with my close friend in the shadow of Olympus Mons.

We're in a new technological age where we're gradually moving from flat 2D screens to 3D experiences that completely surround us. VR is an umbrella term for immersive experiences using a head-mounted display and controllers that track your body's movement. The experience is projected around you so that you feel absorbed into another realm.

Curiosity pushed me to seek out opportunities in this space, and I ended up becoming the first content designer to work on AR/VR experiences at Meta Reality Labs (formerly known as Facebook). I've had firsthand experience defining the evolution from 2D user experience (UX) writing to 3D content design. At first it was hard to figure out what content problems I needed to solve in 3D spaces, but I centered myself around the core principles of my role as a UX practitioner, which allowed me to focus on how to guide and orient people in a simple, human, and straightforward way.

VR is the next frontier for how media and experiences will be consumed. Much like how the mass adoption of the smartphone drove mobile-first content design, we need to prioritize our storytelling and writing skills to further guide consumers in the new ways of approaching VR content.

Here are some tips on how to get started so you can identify opportunities and navigate the new challenges that VR will present to your audiences when they participate in a 3D experience.

Tip #1: Think Spatially — Invite Your Audience in as a Participant

VR experiences occur in a 360-degree format, and your audience is totally immersed in this realm — they can't see the "real" world around them when in a headset. They'll also appear as an avatar and will experience virtual embodiment, feeling as if they are truly in this virtual space.

In 3D experiences, your audience can decide where to look and how to move around a space. This differs from designing content for 2D flows or documentation, where your audience only has a few choices and limited agency. Similar to immersive theater, such as a murder mystery dinner where all of the attendees are participating in the show, your audience needs to be invited in so they feel welcome and comfortable.

A "real-world" example of this is *The Speakeasy*, a long-running immersive theater show in San Francisco that transports the audience to the Roaring Twenties. Everyone arrives dressed in flapper-era costumes and is invited to drink and dance alongside the actors. They're also guided from one room to the next as the scenes play out during the evening. It's an experience in which the audience is truly immersed in the story, the space, and the vibe.

In VR, as with *The Speakeasy,* the entire experience is a stage and the audience can direct their attention wherever they please. This freedom can actually feel overwhelming, though, and they may not know where to look or what to do next. Our role in designing VR content is to understand the space within the 3D experience and how to guide audiences through it in a natural way that doesn't detract from the experience.

Use your own real-life experiences as a guide. Take going to the movies as an example. We can identify the space-based elements in the virtual experience that map to a real-life experience like this:

- **Location** is where the experience takes place. In the case of going to the movies, it is the actual theater, including the screen and the seats.
- **Activity** is what you do at the location. Here, we're watching a movie.
- **People** are the actors involved in this activity at this location. This would be you and the other people in the theater, but it could also

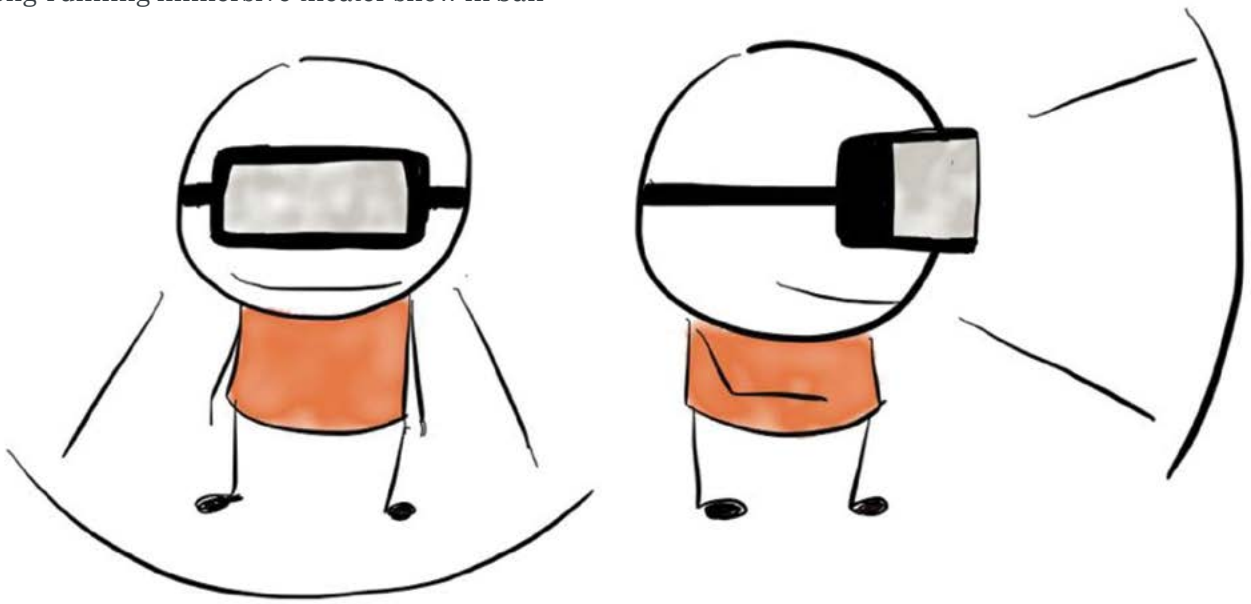

Illustration by Cheryl Lowry.

include the people who are selling the tickets and working at the concession stand.

When going to see a movie, your audience can make different decisions, like choosing where to sit, who to go with, or what movie to see. Your audience will have these same decisions to make in VR, so you need to think about how they decide about these core elements.

Tip #2: Write Beyond Words — Use Visuals, Sound, and Motion

VR technology allows for multisensory experiences and makes use of visuals, sound, touch, and movement. Think about leveraging these elements to help a VR space come to life. Sound cues, arrows, and even tour guides can help lead participants through an experience.

After you've identified the spatial elements in the experience (*location, activity,* and *people*), you can think about which of these multisensory elements can be found in familiar spaces. Let's take a look at the movie theater example again. When you look around, there are familiar spatial cues — movie posters letting you know what is coming soon; a ticket taker who greets you and lets you know where to go; directional sounds, like popcorn popping, that indicate where the concession stand is; and doorways with signs indicating where each movie is playing — to help you navigate. Each one of these is an element you can use to help users navigate the space.

- **Arrows and signs** are commonly used in wayfinding. These signs can act as visual indicators to help guide people through a physical environment and can orient them in that space.
- **Tour guides** are commonly used in video games as non-player characters. You can use these elements to help your audience feel welcome and gain confidence. These familiar people in a specific space, like the ticket taker at the movies, can help naturally guide your audience through the experience.
- **Spatialized sounds** in a theater may be a bell signaling the end of intermission, a song playing through a door, or a sound coming from a specific location. These directional sounds can help focus your audience's attention so they can navigate a space or complete a task.

Writing beyond words can be challenging for UX writers because we've been trained to think about what needs to show up on a screen or a page. However, in multimodal experiences, we need to push ourselves to think about what we want to communicate to our audience with multisensory methods. We're no longer depending on a user to press a button, turn a page, or even read a word, but we need them to move through a space and interact with content. Multisensory elements have localized connotations to them and need to be considered for internationalization.

Thinking beyond words allows us to embrace the entire language of VR and to think more like screenwriters and less like copywriters. We need to identify different ways to guide and help our audience learn when in a VR experience. Being able to gently refocus a user's attention on a button or an entryway that's just out of their reach is an opportunity for us to design content.

Tip #3: Design for Inclusion — Create Experiences for Everyone

Up until now we've discussed how we can write beyond words to help people feel welcome and comfortable in VR experiences. Another consideration for space-based experiences is setting expectations for behaviors. While some VR experiences can be played alone, others are multiplayer, which increases the risk for disruptive behaviors. Harassment or bad behavior on the Internet isn't new. In the 1990s it was trolling in chat rooms, and that eventually segued into bullying and cyberstalking on various social media platforms. We've seen over and over that, when people are anonymous and on new platforms, abuse follows. Virtual embodiment can feel real, and the physicality of VR will give harassers troubling new ways to attack. When we design content for new experiences, we need to protect the most vulnerable participants by creating safe spaces for everyone.

One way to do this is by setting expectations with social norms. In existing experiences like going to the movies, there are established norms: You expect everyone to be quiet, turn off their cell phones, and sit in their seats when the movie starts. These norms facilitate appropriate behaviors and determine what others can expect

from the experience. How we connect in 3D spaces is new and doesn't yet have a set of norms to facilitate behaviors.

It is critical to understand how people perceive appropriate behaviors in the real world. In our day-to-day lives, there is etiquette in how we interact with people. You don't wear your pajamas in public. You don't skip the line or cut somebody off in traffic. And, if those behaviors do happen, you can take action to stop them. VR has very similar social modalities to what we experience in our real lives, but because VR is such a nascent format, the social norms we experience in reality have yet to be applied. To bring equity to VR, we need to establish a new set of rules and expectations to govern behavior so that we can ensure a good experience for everyone.

Lean on what you know and start a conversation with your audience

Similar to writing documentation or UX content design, you need to understand who your audience is and help them successfully complete the VR experience. As writers, we need to think spatially, write beyond words, and design responsibly. These skills enhance the core skills that we already have and will help us get ahead and drive AR/VR content design.

Now is the Time to Expand Your Skills to Write for VR

Get started by jumping into a VR experience to understand spatial design, multisensory elements, and multiplayer experiences. Even if you don't have access to a VR headset right away, you can still hone the skills mentioned. The next time you're at a movie theater, take note of all the content that is there to guide you: the movie posters on the walls, the ticket seller, the concession stand, the pre-movie announcements. You can start to develop awareness of a spatial experience and all the possibilities for communication and content design in real-life spaces.

We need to expand our skill sets as writers and be willing to leave our comfort zones so we can be ready for the evolution of communication design for VR.

Thanks to Nadine Anglin for editing! ■

Resources to get started:

1. Cortese, Michelle, and Andrea Zeller. 2021. "A Blueprint for Designing Inclusive AR/VR Experiences." Medium. https://medium.com/designatmeta/the-day-my-mother-in-law-put-on-a-virtual-reality-vr-headset-was-the-day-i-realized-just-how-b4158c90ecde.
2. Newton, Katy, and Karin Soukup. (2016). "The Storyteller's Guide to the Virtual Reality Audience." Medium. https://medium.com/stanford-d-school/the-storyteller-s-guide-to-the-virtual-reality-audience-19e92da57497.
3. Zeller, Andrea. 2018. "Designing for Virtual Reality: 3 Tips for Content Strategists." Medium. https://medium.com/designatmeta/the-day-my-mother-in-law-put-on-a-virtual-reality-vr-headset-was-the-day-i-realized-just-how-b4158c90ecde.
4. Learn more about The Speakeasy and immersive theater. https://www.thespeakeasysf.com

ANDREA ZELLER (andreamzeller@gmail.com) is a virtual and augmented reality communication designer. She began her career as a filmmaker and is now a lead content designer at Meta. She helped grow the content strategy discipline to writing beyond the screen at the University of Washington. Her work focuses on applying storytelling and ethical communication patterns to participatory experiences.

Current Skill Set	Expanding Skill Set
- Writing, editing, and proofreading - Liaising with other professionals - Communicating ideas - Designing information and layouts - Participating in the product development process	+ Thinking spatially: Understanding how an audience can navigate a space when they are within an experience + Writing beyond words: Embracing the language of VR to help users navigate in immersive experiences + Thinking responsibly: Identifying possible negative actions and how to nurture a healthy culture

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Two Easy Paths to Infographics

By Kelly Schrank | Associate Fellow

With a little bit of knowledge, time, and research, you can create eye-catching infographics

Whether your clients or employers actually know to call them infographics or they just want more visual representation of information, you may need to present your data in a more visually appealing manner to keep up with changing ways of communicating. Sometimes client or employer complaints reflect a feeling that something isn't right, but they don't know how to fix it. This uncertainty may present itself in many ways: *How can we make this look nicer? Would this look better in a chart? Could we have an image here?*

Even if they aren't asking for it yet, it's coming. Infographics are everywhere! People just don't have the patience or attention span to read long paragraphs. They want short phrases, clear connections between ideas, and content that gets to the point right away.

The concepts behind infographics include elements of data visualization.[1]

Charts and graphs are used to help people quickly see patterns in data, and icons and other graphic elements are used to catch the reader's eye or to show the point of the content. This article will discuss the elements of infographics, how to create them using sites and the tools and templates in PowerPoint, and where to look for inspiration when trying to make data and content more visually appealing and easily shareable.

What is an Infographic?

There are many different types of infographics, but they tend to have some common characteristics.

Infographics are created from three elements as shown in Figure 1: visual, content, and knowledge.[2] The *visual* elements come up again and again: color coding, graphics, and reference icons. Also essential to any infographic is the *content*, which includes time frames and timelines, statistics, and references. And lastly are the facts and deductions that make up the *knowledge* contained in the infographic. In theory, as a technical communicator, you should be comfortable with the *content* and *knowledge* part, but you might be struggling with putting them into a new *visual* format. This article will discuss this in more detail.

Data visualization is the graphical representation of information and data. By using visual elements like charts, graphs, and maps, data visualization tools provide an accessible way to see and understand trends, outliers, and patterns in data.

Infographics come in different sizes based on their use:

- The first size is the smallest, and it can be any size or shape. Infographic images are often used to provide visual interest or to make connections between ideas or data.
- The second size is a normal 8.5" x 11" document, either one or two pages in length. These infographics are used for handouts or in place of a document on a website.
- The last size is a rolling infographic, which can also be any size. Rolling infographics often appear as long images on a website, where they can be scrolled through to get to different sections. They can cover a lot of information, but they are usually via a website and shared with a link to the site.

How Do You Create Infographics?

There are different paths you can take to create infographics, depending on your skill level, experience, and the resources available to you. For those with some graphic design skills and experience with software like Adobe Illustrator, creating an infographic from scratch might be a reasonable option. (Even better if you have access to a graphic designer who can help you take your ideas to life!) For those without these skills or software, creating infographics using a website that specializes in infographics would be one easy option. For those with experience with PowerPoint who like to have a little more control over what they create, or who need a more cost-effective option, using the templates and tools in PowerPoint would be another easy path.

Websites

There are many websites that help you create infographics (Figure 1). All you have to do is pick a design and type information into it. With any luck the site's design will fit your needs, with good colors, shapes, fonts, and the right spaces for the content you need to add. The site can essentially do the graphic design for you.

All the sites listed in Figure 1 have infographic templates. Canva, Piktochart, and Visme also provide a variety of other graphic designs: slide sets, images, posts, and videos. Infogram and Venngage are more focused on the rolling infographic and are the most locked down with the free version of their services. Neither allows you to export the infographics you create on their site with the free version, so all you'll have is the version on their website with their logo or watermark. Because most clients and employers will not want their infographics to be branded/watermarked or published to the public site of one of these companies, you would have to upgrade to a paid version to be able to use it with clients and employers. The estimated costs in Figure 1 reflect individual accounts (each $ symbol represents $10, and costs reflect those at the time of publication), but upgrading to a team or corporate account would have the added benefit of sharing what you create with your team to allow collaboration.

PowerPoint

Templates

For those with the Office 365 version of PowerPoint and some skills (or those who are willing to learn), you can use PowerPoint and some of its templates to create different types of infographics.

Current versions of PowerPoint for PC and Mac have native templates for infographics. Some of these available files will be whole slide decks with infographic-like elements, while others contain

Sites	Free Option Limitations			Paid Option
	Export	Publish	Watermark	Cost, per month
Canva	✓			$
Infogram		✓	✓	$$
Piktochart	✓	✓	✓	$$$
Venngage		✓	✓	$$$$$
Visme	✓	✓	✓	$$$$

Figure 1. Infographic image showing sites that can be used to create infographics.
Note: *This infographic was created using PowerPoint.*

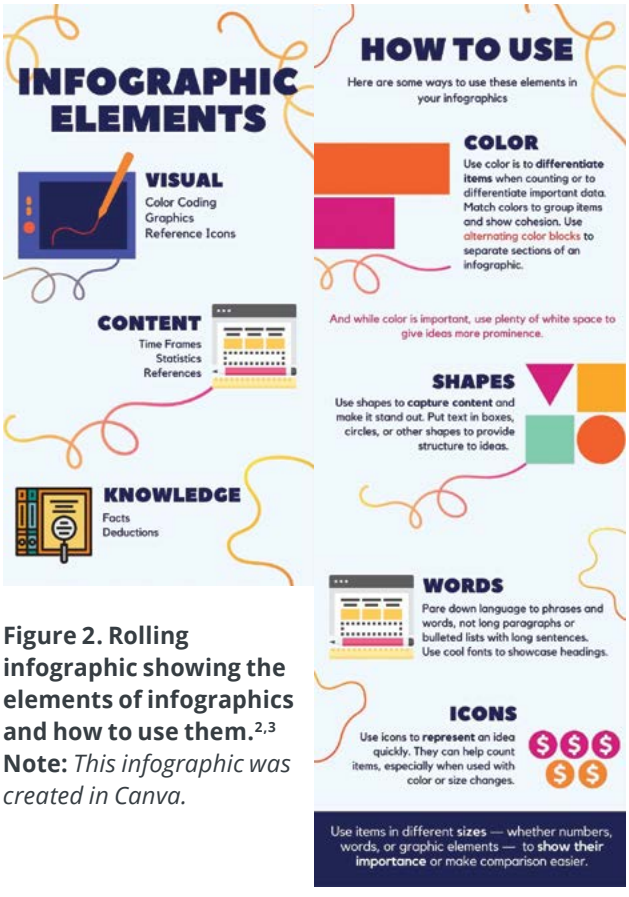
INFOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS
VISUAL
Color Coding
Graphics
Reference Icons
CONTENT
Time Frames
Statistics
References
KNOWLEDGE
Facts
Deductions
HOW TO USE
Here are some ways to use these elements in your infographics
COLOR
Use color is to differentiate items when counting or to differentiate important data. Match colors to group items and show cohesion. Use alternating color blocks to separate sections of an infographic.
And while color is important, use plenty of white space to give ideas more prominence.
SHAPES
Use shapes to capture content and make it stand out. Put text in boxes, circles, or other shapes to provide structure to ideas.
WORDS
Pare down language to phrases and words, not long paragraphs or bulleted lists with long sentences. Use cool fonts to showcase headings.
ICONS
Use icons to represent an idea quickly. They can help count items, especially when used with color or size changes.
Use items in different sizes — whether numbers, words, or graphic elements — to show their importance or make comparison easier.

Figure 2. Rolling infographic showing the elements of infographics and how to use them.[2,3]
Note: *This infographic was created in Canva.*

just one infographic element, like a timeline or a chart. Others have images (called icons in this article), and many are the one- or two-page infographics discussed earlier (some are called *posters* and others are just named with the topic). Some templates have text that coincides with the topic; others have placeholder text (*lorem ipsum*). The added benefit of using PowerPoint is the ability to share files with coworkers and collaborate in a tool that is ubiquitous in modern offices.

You can also download PowerPoint infographic templates from different companies for free or a fee; GraphicMama has a list of free templates to get you started.

Whether using infographic templates provided within PowerPoint or from an outside provider, you can change any of the elements of the template — from its size or shape to the colors, fonts, images, or sizes — just like you can in any other PowerPoint file.

Tools

PowerPoint in Office 365 has many more options than older versions: more options in SmartArt, more icons, and more stock images. If you have an older version of PowerPoint, you will still have templates and SmartArt, but you may not have the same icons or as many stock images to choose from.

SmartArt can be helpful in putting together processes or other structural elements if a template does not have the right elements. After getting the text into the SmartArt, if you need more control over the shapes, you can convert the SmartArt to shapes and move all of the shapes around exactly where you need them.

Icons can accomplish a lot in infographics: They can act as bullets in a list, allow you to show the count of items, or define the text next to them. You can change the icons in PowerPoint to be any size or color, and move them wherever they're needed to bring visual interest or enhance the reader's understanding of the content.

Becoming comfortable with changing the colors or sizes of icons and shapes, changing the text font or size, and adjusting the size of the template file itself in PowerPoint can allow you to create an infographic that covers your topic adequately and provides visual interest to your audience without expensive software.

Where Do You Get Inspiration?

Where can you get design ideas, see what's in fashion (yes, it's constantly evolving), and see what good design looks like? One way to spark your imagination is to go to your search engine of choice and search for *infographics*. Just be sure to search for images by choosing the **Images** tab in Google, for instance, instead of the standard **All** tab, which shows you all of the search engine results. You don't necessarily want to read about infographics; the point here is to inundate yourself with images of infographics to see what they look like as a whole body of knowledge. That way, you're sure to get some ideas for your own projects.

While on the Internet, check out sites like Canva, Piktochart, and Visme, all of which offer infographic templates, even if you don't use them to create your infographics. Also open PowerPoint to explore its options, especially the templates, SmartArt, and icons.

Infographics aren't going away anytime soon, so it's a good idea to get familiar with the elements of infographics and how you can use them to visually represent your information. ■

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Improving Usability in Smartphone Apps

By Kristin Marie Bivens | STC member
and Candice A. Welhausen | STC member

Leveraging unstructured feedback and user-generated content can improve the user's experience

The rise of Web 3.0 and its emphasis on technologies that enable personalization, as well as peer-to-peer (or customer-to-customer) interactions, provides new opportunities for users to generate content. Social media entertainment platforms, such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as databases that crowdsource information about health-related issues (e.g., Stuff That Works), increasingly allow users to contribute information. For instance, users of these technologies might write a review about a product or service, post a comment intended to help another user troubleshoot a software or hardware issue, or provide other kinds of feedback, such as health-related advice.

Creators or developers of these technologies then might use this information to make changes to their product or service. Such information is commonly referred to as user-generated content (UGC). UGC can take the form of text, images, videos, or audio, and it has proliferated exponentially over the past few years. For instance, have you ever reviewed or read about a product you bought through Amazon? Posted, liked, or shared a comment in an online discussion forum, such as Reddit? If so, you've created or interacted with UGC. As several scholars working in advertising and media studies defined the concept, UGC is "content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet."[1]

UGC is widely available, and it's also highly valuable. UGC can be sponsored, staged, or unfiltered. It can also be created spontaneously for content creators' or users' followers. For example, UGC might take the form of a comment about an app posted on Google Play or the App Store; a review for a local restaurant on Yelp or TripAdvisor; or even information for a mobile health (mHealth) app, such as the fitness tracker Fitbit, which records exercise, movement, and sleeping habits; or Glucose Buddy, which helps

users manage diabetes. Indeed, many people find the comments and opinions of other users/customers *more* credible than information from companies and organizations. And they use UGC to make decisions about what products, services, or technologies to buy. Scholars in technical and professional communication, too, have recognized the importance of UGC, arguing that this information can be used to better understand users' needs in particular contexts, such as improving the usability of technology products. When unfiltered, UGC can offer a unique and rich source of valuable feedback and untapped data to better understand how users use products, software, or other items.

In this article, we focus on how technical communicators can apply UGC to improve the usability of smartphone apps by briefly addressing two interrelated questions:

- How might UGC be leveraged to improve the usability of apps?
- How can users be prompted to provide valuable UGC feedback?

Leveraging UGC to Improve App Usability

Usability research on apps often tends to focus on functional usability — that is, whether the app actually works and if users can use it effectively to perform the tasks it was designed for. To illustrate, let's say you want to use a fitness tracker to record your daily walk or run. After your activity, you open the app on your smartphone linked to the tracker. When you do, you expect to be able to use the app to determine how far you went and how long it took you to go that distance. Depending on how sophisticated the tracker and the app are, you might also expect to access other information that the device collected, such as your heart rate at different points during your activity or a map of the route you took. If you have trouble performing these kinds of tasks, most likely you are experiencing a functional usability problem.

Usability testing with users is usually designed to resolve these kinds of issues. To be sure, ensuring that apps (and their associated technologies) function as they should and are easy to use is crucial, as usability researcher Barbara Mirel explains.[2] However, focusing on usability *only* from this perspective can emphasize the interests and needs of app developers and creators (or those who commission their work) rather than users. As scholars in technical and professional communication found, users often have their own goals and objectives when they use digital technologies, which may be different from what designers and creators of those technologies envisioned.[3]

UGC related to apps often takes the form of review comments, wherein users may write about their specific experience using the app and/or what they liked or disliked about using it. Such information is often unstructured because in product and technology reviews, users discuss what they want to discuss. In considering how this form of UGC might be leveraged to improve the usability of an app, there are both pros and cons. On the one hand, review comments can lend important and specific insight into what *users* (rather than app developers or creators) care about, which can be used to make improvements to better meet users' needs. On the other hand, not all comments will be helpful. Indeed, many users might provide comments — as we found in our study[4] on technical communication, UGC, and the mHealth apps created by PulsePoint — that aren't actionable, such as simply stating they do or don't like the app without explaining why. In the next section, we address this challenge by providing strategies that technical communicators who work in app development and usability can use to elicit more valuable UGC from smartphone app users.

Prompting Users

If you own a smartphone or tablet, chances are you've downloaded an app before. And if you used it, you may have seen a pop-up screen a few weeks later asking you to rank it: "Enjoying [app name]? Tap a star to rate it." Asking users to provide this kind of rating assessment is quick and easy, and it can increase an app's popularity. Conversely, inviting users to provide a more detailed assessment in a review is more time consuming. Yet with prompting, we suggest, reviews can provide specific, actionable information that can then be used to improve the user's experience. To do so, we provide the following suggestions and examples based on findings in Welhausen and Bivens:[4]

1. Include a dialog box that appears after users click the "Submit" button that asks them to add examples to their review (Figure 1).

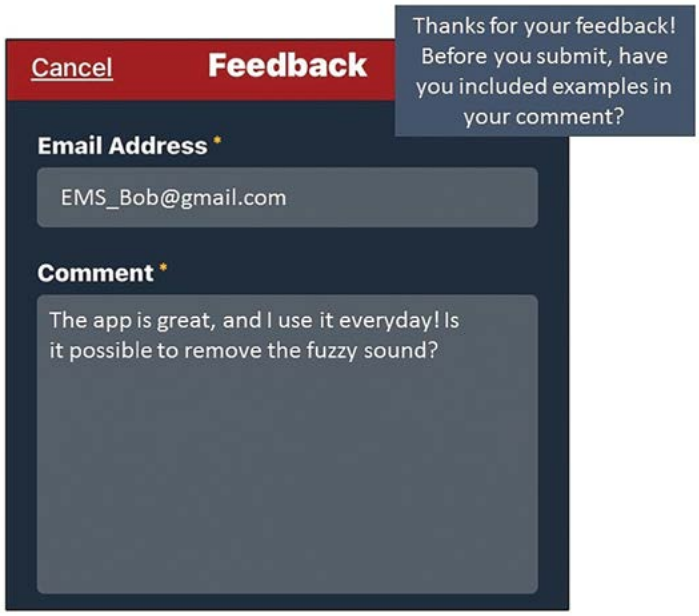
Cancel
Feedback
Thanks for your feedback! Before you submit, have you included examples in your comment?
Email Address *
EMS_Bob@gmail.com
Comment *
The app is great, and I use it everyday! Is it possible to remove the fuzzy sound?

Figure 1. The dialog box pops up to remind reviewers to add examples, which then might help clarify and provide specific information that is meaningful for app developers.

2. Help users meaningfully sort their reviews by including a drop-down menu on the review screen with predetermined categories. Users can then select the category that their review best represents (Figure 2).

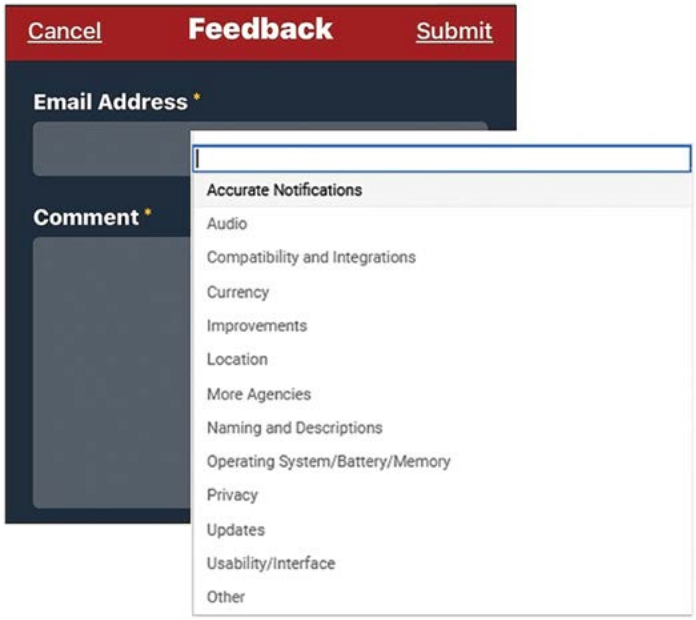

Figure 2. The drop-down menu items suggest that reviews should fit into these categories. This can function as a reminder to reviewers to write details or describe other issues related to these items while also providing a flexible "other" category to sort comments that do not fit into the predetermined categories.

3. Provide an example of an actionable kind of review that users can model in their review — that is, statements that ideally demonstrate a claim and provide support (Figure 3).

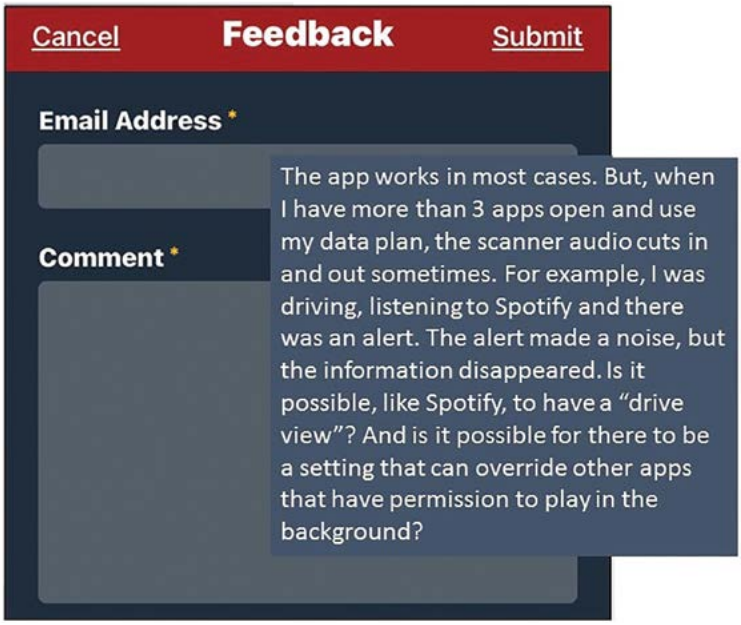
Cancel
Feedback
Submit
Email Address *
Comment *
The app works in most cases. But, when I have more than 3 apps open and use my data plan, the scanner audio cuts in and out sometimes. For example, I was driving, listening to Spotify and there was an alert. The alert made a noise, but the information disappeared. Is it possible, like Spotify, to have a "drive view"? And is it possible for there to be a setting that can override other apps that have permission to play in the background?

Figure 3. The example comment serves as a model of a kind of review that provides actionable, helpful information that might be meaningful for app developers. Notice the level of detail (i.e., numbers, proper nouns); leading phrases, such as "for example"; the use of questions; and comparisons that draw from a user's mental models (i.e., Spotify's drive view).

4. Be sure to respond to reviews and interact with comments (Figure 4).

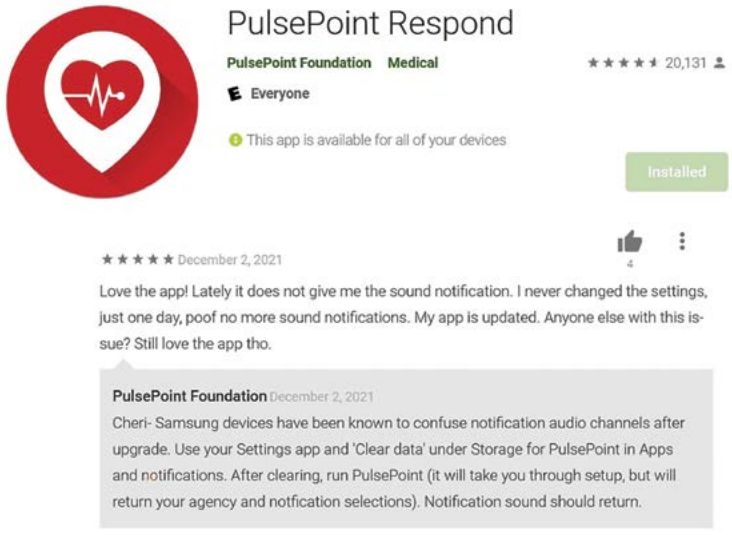
PulsePoint Respond
PulsePoint Foundation Medical
20,131
Everyone
This app is available for all of your devices
Installed
December 2, 2021
Love the app! Lately it does not give me the sound notification. I never changed the settings, just one day, poof no more sound notifications. My app is updated. Anyone else with this issue? Still love the app tho.
PulsePoint Foundation December 2, 2021
Cheri- Samsung devices have been known to confuse notification audio channels after upgrade. Use your Settings app and 'Clear data' under Storage for PulsePoint in Apps and notifications. After clearing, run PulsePoint (it will take you through setup, but will return your agency and notfication selections). Notification sound should return.

Figure 4. Interactions between users and app developers provide opportunities to meaningfully engage with those who use apps and quickly address issues, such as the one described here. In this way, users know that app development teams are responsive and responsible, which builds trust, supports relationship-building, and opens opportunities for thoughtful, easy exchanges about the app and its functionality.

Concluding Thoughts

UGC does not replace traditional usability testing or other methods, such as observations, that technical communicators can use to learn about audiences and usability. Rather, it offers a complementary view, as well as arguably a more user-centered perspective, by focusing on unstructured user feedback. As technology continues to advance and machine learning systems become more sophisticated, it may also be possible for app developers to construct artificial intelligence algorithms or augmented intelligence tools that provide more nuanced prompts for users when they complete reviews. For instance, future interfaces may be able to determine which app features the user is describing and provide specific prompts to help guide their feedback.

Ultimately, UGC will continue to proliferate, and we are still in the process of identifying all the ways it might be used to learn more specific information about users. As such, UGC will continue to offer novel opportunities for practitioners to mine this valuable, rapidly expanding source of user-driven information, thereby improving quality and satisfaction with smartphone apps. ■

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Further Reading

Welhausen and Bivens discuss UGC in STC's *Tech Comm*

mHealth Apps and Usability: Using User-Generated Content to Explore Users' Experiences with a Civilian First Responder App

https://www.bit.ly/358A3d6

PulsePoint

https://www.pulsepoint.org/resources

Stuff That Works

https://www.stuffthatworks.health/

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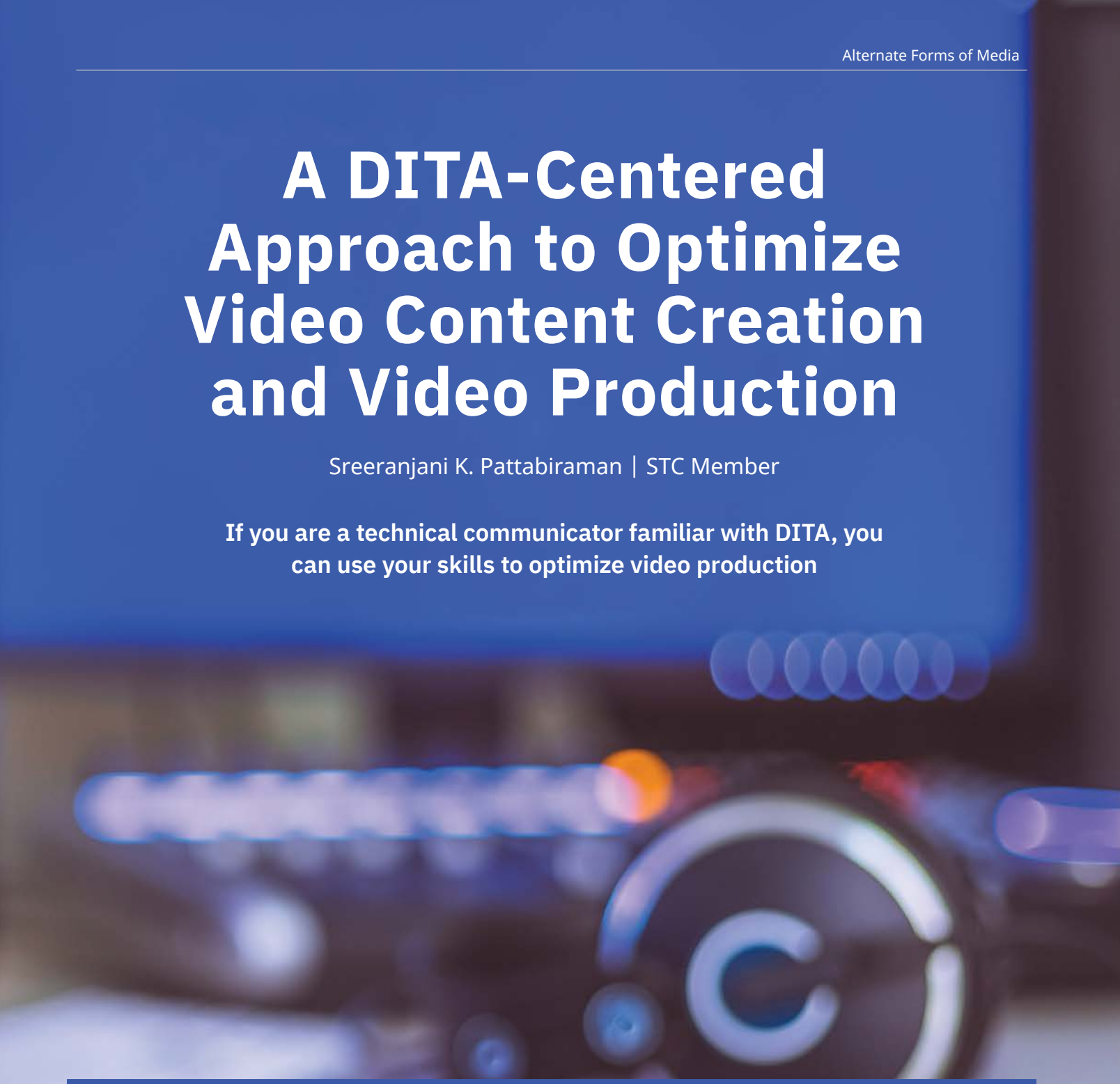
INPUT
INPUT
4

A DITA-Centered Approach to Optimize Video Content Creation and Video Production

Sreeranjani K. Pattabiraman | STC Member

If you are a technical communicator familiar with DITA, you can use your skills to optimize video production



If you produce video content, you know how time consuming it can be to film, edit, publish, and maintain videos. While there are various best practices for optimizing video documentation, it is ideal if technical communicators can port their existing expertise. Enter Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA)!

In this article, I will explain how applying various DITA principles, such as content architecture, topic-based authoring, and minimalism, to the video production process has helped me develop and establish standards and streamline the content for video production and maintenance.

Demand for Video Content in Technical Documentation

DITA, the Extensible Markup Language (XML)-based standard for content authoring and publishing, is widely used by almost 150,000

technical communicators, according to data from LinkedIn.[1] Over the years, apart from developing content, technical communicators have assumed the roles of information architects, editors, instructional designers, content owners, illustrators, project managers, and increasingly video content creators.

In 2018, when my team was moved under new management, one of the phrases that we kept hearing was "increase in creating video content." Although my team was producing *some* videos at this point, we believed that we had the scope to modernize and standardize the process.

The rise of video content and demand for explainer videos has presented a use case for technical communicators to expand their horizons to cater to the video content needs of their audience. In 2021, a Wyzowl Video Marketing statistic[2] found that 96 percent of people have watched an explainer video to learn more about a product or service. About 69 percent of people said they prefer to learn about a product or a service via video content, compared to 18 percent of people who prefer to read a text-based article, 4 percent who like to view an infographic, 3 percent who would download and read an eBook or a manual, and a mere 2 percent who would get on a sales call.

Hierarchy of Video Creator Needs and User Needs for Video Documentation

When I started creating product videos for Extreme Networks' wireless hardware networking products, it was crucial to analyze the users' needs. At the same time, it was also important to understand my needs as a video producer. Therefore, I established a two-part model to determine video creator needs and user needs based on Aarron Walter's Hierarchy of User Needs.[3] This hierarchy suggests that a product must be usable for the user to derive any delight from using it (Figure 1).

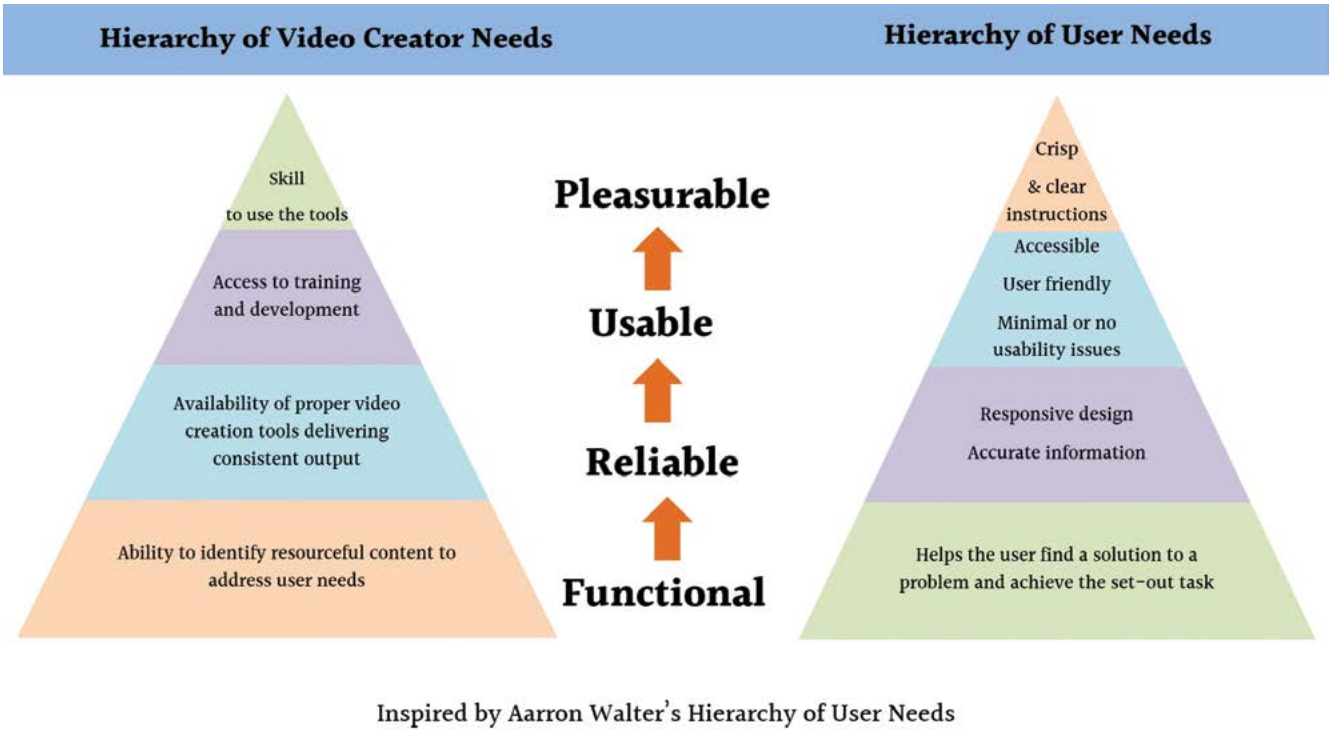


Figure 1. Hierarchy of video creator and user needs.

While technical communicators may be required to learn new tools to produce videos, the content creation process is not entirely unfamiliar. They can port their existing DITA skills to approach the video creation, production, and maintenance process. In my years of producing videos, I deployed my DITA knowledge and skills, and it has helped me streamline the video creation process. The three main areas where I use my DITA knowledge include:

1. Learning how to use DITA principles to identify appropriate content for video production
2. Analyzing the convergence of DITA principles and video content
3. Measuring content and customer success

Identify Video Content Using DITA Principles

The first step to successfully create video content lies in identifying a proper topic for video production. This ties closely with the technical communicator's ability to conduct thorough audience analysis. By understanding and anticipating the needs of the audience, the writer can determine the type of content that warrants video documentation. In this step, I will share which DITA principle works best for identifying content for video production.

DITA Principle Used: Information Typing

Information typing in DITA encourages the writer to structure the content based on the nature of the content. The three main types of content as described by DITA are concept, task, and reference. When identifying content for video production, use information typing to determine the type of video you want to produce.

- Concept video: This type of video will tell your audience **about** a product. Examples include product introduction, new feature update, promotional and marketing videos, support information, and unboxing videos.
- Task video: This type of video addresses **how** to use a product. It includes the steps required to install or navigate the product user interface (UI). Some examples include product installation information, software registration steps, and any type of procedural information.
- Reference video: Use this type of video to state **facts** about a product. For instance, product specifications, software codes, command line information, safety guidelines, or product usage data are good topics for reference videos.

Convergence and Application of DITA Principles and Video Content

One of the most frequently asked questions during the video production process is, "What are some the best practices to follow when creating videos?" Let's use your DITA skills to address this question.

DITA Principle Used: Content Architecture

After you identify appropriate content for your video, it's time to put the **"A"** in **DITA** to use. Apply the principle of content architecture to create structure for your video content. How can you do this?

1. Standardized video scripts: Before you create any video, ensure that you have a script in hand. A standardized video script will help you determine the tools required to produce the video, content architecture for the video content itself, number of shots, and video duration. Scripts will also ensure that the overall video outline remains consistent across various products handled by your organization.

You can go even more granular by creating script templates based on your video's information type discussed in the previous section (Figure 2).

Sample Video Script Template

Criteria	Video shot and description	Approximate audio length (in seconds)	Video to be filmed	Voiceover	DITA principle application
Description	**Use a numeric followed by a short description (less than 10 words)**	**Time**	**Draft description of video output**	**Audio script to be read in correlation with the video shot**	**Potential for using a DITA principle**
	1 Company intro slide (generic)	:5	Company logo video	None	Modularity • Marketing video • Company presentation • Product review
	2 Video intro	:10	Show product photo and include a company branded static slide with video title	You are currently watching the unboxing of the latest Apple iPhone SE	Accessibility • Using a static slide and including video title will help set video thumbnail
	3 Product overview	:25	Show the product and highlight the USP 	iPhone SE is the most powerful phone in the under $500 price-range market offering seamless functionalities at an affordable price	Reuse
	4 Package exterior	:5	Show the sides of the box with labels. When mentioning about the labels, zoom in and show the labels. Side angle shot	The phone is shipped in a sealed cardboard box. Do not accept the box if the seal is broken	
	5 Box contents	:45	Take out the box contents, lay it out, and point to each box content. Zoom in on the box contents 	The box contains the following items: • One iPhone. • A lightening to USB cable, • Wall charger, • Sim card removal tool, • User manual, and • An apple sticker	Topic-based authoring Localization
	6 Outro	:20	Show the screen of the Apple documentation link and navigate to the Install Guide. Roll out company's end credit	For more details about iPhone SE startup options, refer to the iPhone SE Installation Guide at www.apple.com	Modularity

Video title: iPhone SE unboxing
Video type: Product overview (Concept video)
Total number of shots: 6
Video duration: 1 min 40 seconds

Figure 2. Video script sample template.

2. Brand design: Another important consideration is your organization's brand design. Include corporate colors, logos, and blurbs within your video content to increase brand awareness and maintain consistent video design.

DITA Principle Used: Topic-Based Authoring

One of the cardinal principles of DITA is topic-based authoring. By applying this principle during video creation, you can create smaller chunks of video content that make sense by themselves individually without being a part of the larger video content. This takes us back to information typing. A video can have components that form a concept, task, or reference topic. You can author this content as part of a single large video or create smaller videos, which ultimately leads to content reuse.

An example of this would be a common intro or outro video element that is uniform across all videos irrespective of the video content type.

DITA Principle Used: Modularity

You must bear in mind that creating modular video content may not happen during the initial few months or even years of video production. However, you can consciously create content, keeping this DITA principle in mind. Creating modular video content will ensure that you have different pieces of videos — part of a concept, task, or product reference video — that can be arranged and rearranged in different ways to create an entirely different type of video content (Figure 3).

For instance, a product introduction video piece can be used in a company-wide video presentation, a product FAQ video, or a product review video. Therefore, my suggestions include keeping the following things in mind when creating video content for modularity:

- Identify how a single piece of video content can be used for multiple outputs, such as animation, an infographic, FAQs video, product review, or company presentation.
- Look for collaborative opportunities within your organization where video content can be deployed by different departments, such as corporate communications, sales, or marketing. Getting external stakeholders within your organization involved will also provide constructive feedback to create better content.
- Create a common video repository for videos that can be accessed and used by other teams.

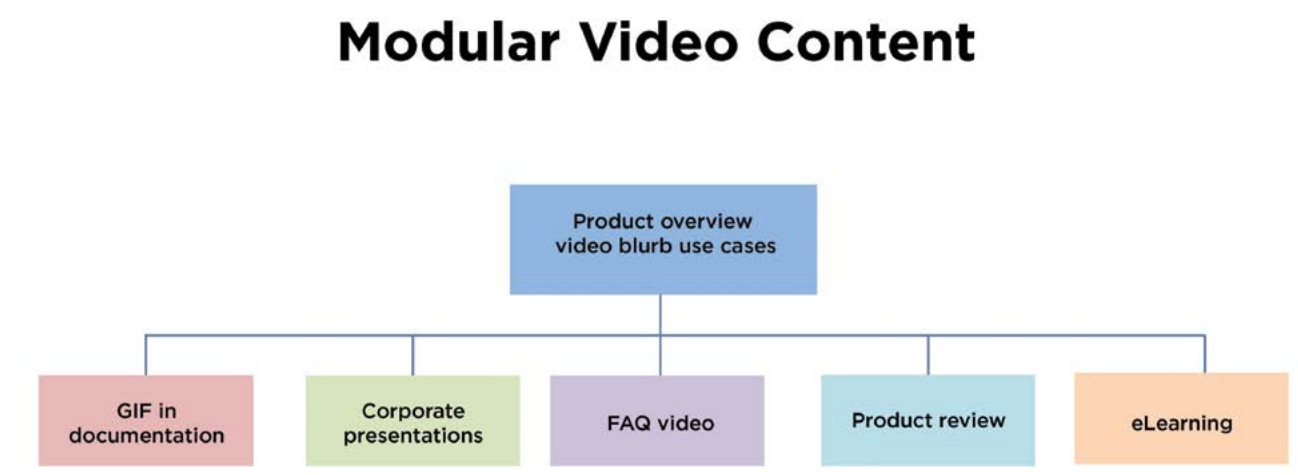


Figure 3. Modular video content example.

DITA Principle Used: Minimalism

When it comes to video content, less is more. A study by Wistia,[4] a video marketing software company, found that videos less than two minutes long had the best engagement rates. I observed this firsthand on my job when I published videos that were over 15 minutes long versus videos that were less than three minutes long.

When I started implementing minimalism to my video content and adjusted the video duration, I observed a drastic jump in video views and positive feedback from the System Engineering team.

Other Consideration: Localization

When creating videos, your content must be understandable to your audience regardless of language. Whether the video uses hardware products or just a screen capture of a software product, the video must be self-explanatory to the audience and free of any language barriers.

Suggestions to keep your video script localization ready include:

- Keep your content generic.
- Avoid pop-culture references.
- Use active voice.
- Do not embed textual elements in images.
- Keep your sentence structure simple.
- Get your source content tested for localization by peers.

Other Consideration: Accessibility

Videos that are accessible by a large audience always perform better. When creating a video, ensure that it is accessible and inclusive to any audience that may be consuming the video. Some things to take into consideration to make an accessible video (Figure 4):

- Do not use rapid-flashing content.
- Include a video transcript in your description.
- Create a video table of contents with timestamps to navigate the video to a specific point.
- Include hyperlinks for related content in the video description.
- Add closed captions or subtitles during your post-production process.
- Ensure that your video is compatible for various screen resolutions.

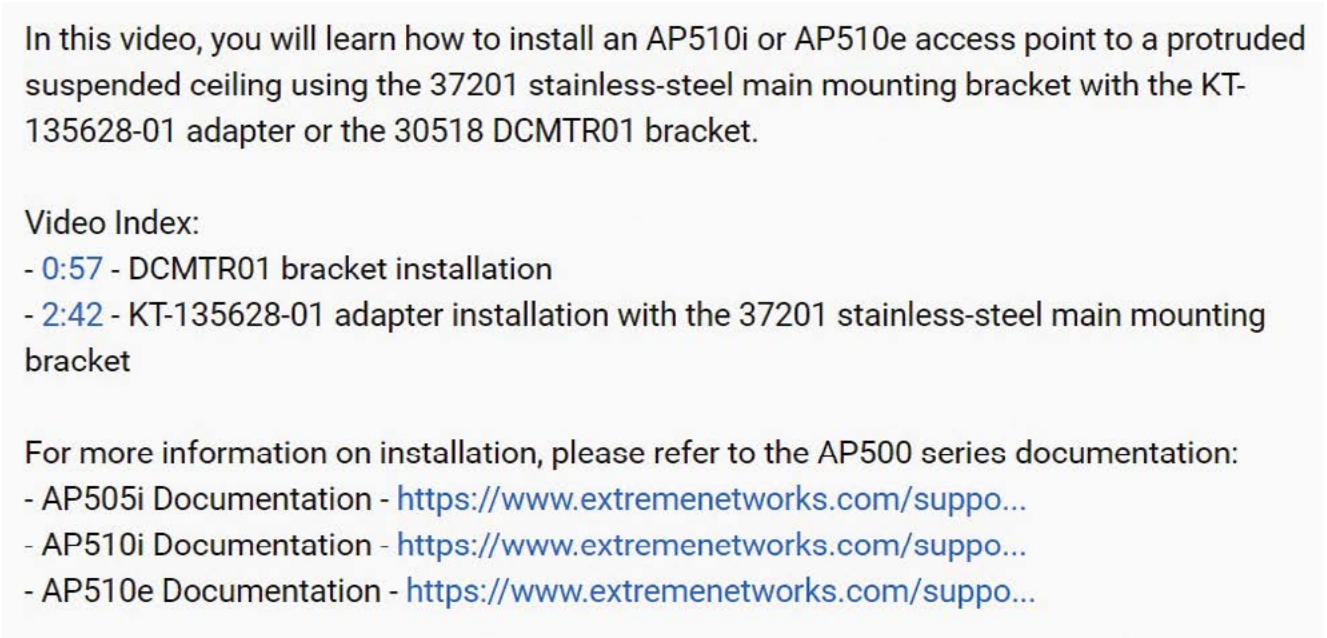

In this video, you will learn how to install an AP510i or AP510e access point to a protruded suspended ceiling using the 37201 stainless-steel main mounting bracket with the KT-135628-01 adapter or the 30518 DCMTR01 bracket.
Video Index:
- 0:57 - DCMTR01 bracket installation
- 2:42 - KT-135628-01 adapter installation with the 37201 stainless-steel main mounting bracket
For more information on installation, please refer to the AP500 series documentation:
- AP505i Documentation - https://www.extremenetworks.com/suppo...
- AP510i Documentation - https://www.extremenetworks.com/suppo...
- AP510e Documentation - https://www.extremenetworks.com/suppo...

Figure 4. Video index example.

Measure Content and Customer Success

After you publish your video, it is important to measure content and customer success to determine if your video production strategies worked. After publishing a video, promote it within your organization to create awareness. Here are some ways you can measure content and customer success:

- Number of page views
- Call for action usage or click for supported or related links
- Direct feedback from customers

While the video production process can be challenging by itself, looking at the overall procedure with a DITA-centric perspective can make the process less intimidating. It has been a trial-and-error process for me to establish these standards for the videos I produce at work. However, deploying DITA principles has helped me streamline the video production process and establish consistency and quality when developing video content. ■

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Smart Glasses Are Coming — Are You Ready?

By Hanna Heinonen

You already have the skills to handle the transition to new media

Professional technical communicators know how to design, author, and publish technical instructions. We gather technical details, talk with subject matter experts, and organize the information. We create step lists, turn complex information into infographics, and make sure that terms are used consistently. When everything is ready and reviewed, we push the right buttons and create the needed outputs. Traditionally, instructions have been distributed as paper copies; more recently, they're circulated as PDFs or through online portals.

But what happens when your company starts talking about new media? What is your answer when you hear buzzwords such as extended or virtual reality? The Internet of Things and connectivity? No need to worry — you have the skills to handle these already!

Exploring the Smart Glasses Scene

I started experimenting with using the Darwin Information Typing Architecture, an Extensible

Markup Language (DITA XML), to create content for smart glasses some years ago. In the first experiments, I took existing technical instructions from the company content management systems and uploaded them to different devices. I invited colleagues from my company to test the devices and the instructions, and then to give feedback. The users had little or no previous experience with augmented reality and smart glasses, and the overall feedback was positive. Smart glasses were seen as a potential answer to a situation where the user's hands are busy holding equipment parts and tools, so they cannot use their phone or hold a paper copy to read instructions.

Figure 1. Testing instructions displayed on smart glasses.

What we learned

- Because the content was not designed to be displayed on a small screen, topics were too long and step lists were difficult to follow due to their length.
- Scrolling was not easy with the voice user interface, and the long topics required lots of scrolling.
- Tabular data was a poor fit for small screens and often required horizontal scrolling that irritates users. Tasks are more suitable content for smart glasses.
- Some users felt lost in the instructions; a sense of location within the instructions is very important.
- DITA XML works well and scales nicely to different devices.
- The content can be easily translated in XML files and used in the same way as the source language files.

Focus on Information Design

Based on these experiments, I concluded that DITA and the delivery part work nicely, but more focus needs to be put on designing the content so that it fits the users' needs instead of automatically converting existing content. I then turned my focus to the user-centered design process, as it is one of the main principles of technical communication. In the next experiment, our research group created three versions of the same tasks: conventional (no redesign of the content, used as the baseline); visual manual (replacing text with illustrations, symbols, and icons); and minimalist (redesign based on minimalism heuristic). The content was created in DITA XML, and a simple application was developed for smart glasses to display the content. To minimize the need for scrolling, the application was designed to show one step at a time, progressing with voice-activated "next" and "back" buttons. We also used a filtering system that uses the semantic tagging of the content. This allowed us to show only certain parts of the existing content to the users, focusing on expert-level information. The setup was tested in a user test.

Figure 2. User test ongoing.

What we learned

- The preferred information design method was minimalist, followed by visual manual. Conventional was the least liked method.
- Having the instructions proceed step-by-step on the screen was a well-received concept.
- Simple progress was not enough to give the users a sense of progress bar location within the instructions, and the relationship between steps and substeps was also not clear to all users. Therefore, navigation needs to be further improved.
- The conventional version had the most description and details, but it was rated lower than the other two for task completion. More details do not necessarily aid understanding or task completion if the user doesn't consider the details to be relevant.
- The user-centered approach with the focus on providing the correct amount of detail works best.
- Filtering information using DITA XML elements is an efficient way to scale information for different user needs.

The Beauty of Single Sourcing and Reuse

I like to describe single sourcing as *write once, reuse many times, and publish everywhere*. In short, you can reuse the same piece of information to create instructions for several different products or user groups without having to copy and paste it. Furthermore, you can also use the same content to publish to several output channels: for example, HTML, the good old PDF, but also to XR solutions. With the approach I have been developing, you can use the same content you have been authoring for the traditional media, then publish a smart glasses-compatible version. There is no need to create separate content for XR — just use what you have! Naturally, as stated above, there are some things that need to be thought through if you want to deliver the content to smaller screens. However, I have noticed that the improvements we made, especially with the user-centered approach of minimalism, also improved the user experience when those instructions are viewed with a phone, read on the screen of a laptop, or even printed out as a traditional manual. Therefore, we were actually improving the overall usability of the content.

Content is Queen

They say that the only thing that is constant is change. New devices are coming to the market, and the technologies advance rapidly. But what would these devices be without the content, the content that you are the expert with? As I see it, smart glasses are only a new media and delivery channel for us to get the information to the users. And you already have the skills to deliver content there!

If you are already in XML, good! You can future-proof your content by making sure the tagging is semantically correct. If you are not yet in XML, there are many options of getting there, from open-source to commercial products. And as you have been doing, continue to think about the user — their tasks, goals, and information needs — and you are good to go! ■

Suggested Reading

1. Heinonen, Hanna, Sanni Siltanen, and Petri Ahola. 2021. "Information Design for Small Screens: Toward Smart Glass Use in Guidance for Industrial Maintenance." *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 64(4): 407–426. https://doi.org/10.1109/TPC.2021.3110616.
2. Siltanen, Sanni, and Hanna Heinonen. 2020. "Scalable and Responsive Information for Industrial Maintenance Work: Developing XR Support on Smart Glasses for Maintenance Technicians." In *Proceedings of the 23rd International Conference on Academic Mindtrek: AcademicMindtrek '20, Tampere, Finland, January 29–30, 2020,* 100–109. New York: Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3377290.3377296

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Podcasting for Fun and/or Profit

By Ed Marsh | STC Associate Fellow

How podcasting can help promote you and your content

In 2022, you have so many more ways and places to reach your audience than the traditional online help, PDF, or website. You can reach people while they're commuting, at the gym, making dinner, or even cleaning the house. With that in mind, have you considered adding a podcast to your repertoire?

Over the course of this article I'll tell you why I started a podcast, then explain why your team or your business should consider having a podcast, and what you need to get started. Just remember that the world today is *multimedia*, and what applies to podcasting in this article can also apply to videos and eLearning.

Why I Created a Podcast

In 2014, I was looking to make a name for myself in the technical communications world. I was also looking for a way to give back to the profession. After writing and editing all day, I

knew I didn't want to come home and write blog posts. I was a journalism major with college radio experience, so I thought a podcast would highlight my interviewing skills. At the time, there weren't too many tech comm-related podcasts (except Tom Johnson, but that guy's *everywhere*). There was opportunity; I did my research and grabbed it. The good news is that it worked. Creating the podcast led to opportunities I expected and several I didn't.

What's in It for You?

What can you showcase or market with a podcast? The simple answer is *marketing*, whether it's you, your team, or your company. Some things to consider:

- Promoting what you and your team do. People can't read your docs on the commute to work or during a workout, but they may want to listen to a five- or 10-minute podcast relevant to their job and your product's role in it.
- Personal promotion. Due to intellectual property laws, many people struggle to share writing samples with potential employers. Podcasting is a terrific way to get yourself and your business out there.

While promotion is the best reason to start, don't underestimate the fun aspect. I thought putting together a podcast would be interesting, but I'm having more fun than I ever thought I would. I'm full of adrenaline and joy after every episode. For the people I knew prior to recording with them, it gave us an opportunity to get to know each other better and learn more than you normally would in five or 10 minutes of conversation in passing between conference sessions. That said, some of my best episodes are with people I didn't know until recording the podcast. This is the fun of podcasting and even more reason to be prepared so you can go off-script, really get to know someone, and create an engaging podcast.

Add Value

Scriptorium, [A], and others have developed podcasts that point to the body of knowledge they've created. You can reference blog posts, help topics, marketing pages, whatever! This shows the scope and depth of what you offer as well as insights into the "why" behind the "what" that you see on your websites. You can further drive traffic by putting the links you mention during recording in your show notes.

Inspiration

Give *Podcast Method* by Dan Benjamin a listen. (Incidentally, Dan went to college to be a technical writer.) It's a few years old now but still 100 percent relevant to starting a podcast. He has a podcast network called 5by5; one of his shows and its professionalism was the inspiration for starting my podcast.

Getting Started

Be aware that competition is greater than it was when I started seven years ago. Ensure your podcast idea has an audience — no matter how small.

If you're looking to do a company podcast, the first place to check is your marketing team. Are they already creating podcasts? If so, is there a way you can link to or embed them in your technical content? If they aren't, is this a value-add for your team? Is there an angle that your team can leverage?

Once you decide that a podcast is a go, it's time for research

- Who is the user? Don't forget that your podcast listener may be internal to your company.
- What do you want to talk about?
- How long do you want it to be?
- Are you doing an audio or video podcast?
- What format should it be in (interview, panel, how-to)?
- Will you have one or multiple hosts?
- Will you have guests? You can interview your stakeholders, people who are contributing content, or people who have a tangential role to what you do. It'll make for some interesting viewpoints.
- Do you want sponsors or ads?
- What podcasts do you like (or not like) that you can model your podcast after?

I knew right away I wanted to do an interview show. Then I had to see if there was enough interest to make this viable. I came up with a guest wish list and invited two friends in the field who I thought would be great guests (spoiler: they were). I was honestly surprised when they quickly and enthusiastically replied, which told me I was heading in the right direction.

How Long Does It Take?

I'm often asked how long it takes to put together an audio podcast. I still don't have a great answer for this, partly because I do all of it myself — guest scheduling, recording, production, show notes, publishing, and social media — and partly because I don't have the time to do it all at once. The best metric I can give you is that I listen to the podcast at least four times: twice (or more) during the editing/production process, once to write down show notes, and once for a final sanity/sound level check. The editing process takes the longest, especially if you're a perfectionist like me. If you want to learn audio production, it's not hard; I watched a series of basics on YouTube while on vacation.

Software

Like most things these days, there are open-source as well as commercial tools to help you create and produce your podcast. There are also several services that will allow you to record each person on the podcast and will put it together for you. You send your guests a link, press record, and the service does the rest. Most services record video as well as audio and can handle some post-production for you. Using these services is helpful when your guests can't install applications on their work laptop (another lesson I learned).

Post-production is the editing of the content and the audio quality. It's actually fun if you're into editing waveforms and audio production, but it can also be tedious, which is another reason to consider a service. If your company has Adobe Creative Cloud licenses, its Audition audio workstation software is included. If not, consider the open-source tool Audacity, which reduces costs but adds complexity. You can also outsource your production to another company. This adds cost but ensures that you'll have a quality podcast from the start, without the learning curve of doing it yourself.

Hardware

You really only need a microphone, headphones, and a computer to record. Microphones can go for about $75 to $400. For your proof of concept, you can use your AirPods or whatever you would use for conference calls or video conferencing, but it's crucial that you invest in a better mic for production. I've unsubscribed from podcasts I thought were unlistenable; your listeners might, too. I started with a mic that cost me less than $100, and it broke right before I was about to record an episode. I then invested in a Blue Yeti Pro that I still use. Invest in a good set of headphones, too, particularly if you're doing post-production.

Be sure to record in a room with little to no echo, and try to ensure that your remote guests do the same. You want your listeners to hear you and your guests, not background noise.

Show Notes

Show notes are a list of references and links that were mentioned during the podcast. It's a nice value-add and can also drive some traffic to and from your site. Most reputable podcasts have show notes, so having them is a sign to your listeners that you're taking the process seriously.

Transcription

Transcription from speech to text is an important consideration for accessibility and search. Automated transcription options to convert your podcast to text continue to improve but still incur a cost. You'll also have to dedicate time to editing the transcript output. Human transcription services are $1 to $2 per minute, so factor in this time and effort when planning.

Hosting

Once you're done, you'll need someplace to host your podcast episodes, transcription, and show notes so people can download and listen to it. There are services dedicated to hosting podcasts, like Libsyn or Squarespace, but you can also host it on your company, business, or personal website. Once you have the feed link set up, you can submit it to the major podcast aggregators like Spotify, YouTube Music, and Apple to drive traffic to your podcast.

Metrics

Everyone wants to know how their podcast is performing. Unfortunately, the only real metric available today is the number of downloads per podcast. There are lots of companies that let you know how many downloads you have for free. A paid account on these services often provides data like country and city of download, if it was downloaded to a phone or a computer, and what operating system your listeners are using.

Summary

You never know where your podcast will lead you. In my case, it's led to writing opportunities (ahem), hosting other podcasts, being a podcast guest, and presenting at STC Summit. I'm fortunate that there was less competition when I started, but taking on this adventure has taken me even further than I imagined seven years ago. Developing a podcast can both broaden your organization's audience while marketing your own skills and knowledge. I encourage you to explore podcasting as part of your 2022 goals. ■

Podcasts to Start

- The Podcast Method
  https://www.5by5.tv/podcastmethod
- Content Content Podcast
  https://www.edmarsh.com/content-content-podcast/
- Scriptorium podcast
  https://www.scriptorium.com/category/podcast/
- [A] podcast
  https://www.simplea.com/Treasury/Podcasts
- Tom Johnson
  https://www.idratherbewriting.com/

ED MARSH (techwriter@edmarsh.com) is a technical writer for a major financial firm, with over 25 years of experience. In 2015, he started the *Content Content* podcast, interviewing technical writers, content strategists, and other people who create content. He was named an STC Associate Fellow in 2020.

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Looking Forward to Summit 2022!

Conference highlights and guidelines for STC's premier event

The Society for Technical Communication's (STC) largest event of the year is just over the horizon. With over 40 exhibitors, here are a few highlights attendees can expect to see!

Sessions Quick Peek

The 5 Business Problems that Content Helps Solve

Presenter: Sharon Burton
11:00 am, 16 May 2022

Participants will leave with solid ideas for demonstrating the business value of content and content strategy.

Would Your Technical Content Pass the Turing Test?

Presenters: Ivana Isadora Devcic and Swapnil Ogale
9:45 am, 17 May 2022

It is no secret AI and voice are massively shaping how consumers perceive products and experiences. How about technical content? Or more specifically, technical writers? How does automation affect technical writers?

Investing in Inclusion: A Dual Imperative for Content Creators

Presenter: Toni Mantych
8:30 am, 18 May 2022

In recent years, both businesses and individuals have put diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) under an increasingly intense spotlight. See why investing in creating inclusive content is increasingly critical, and how to increase the inclusivity of our content.

COVID-19 Summit Guidelines

STC requires all attendees, speakers, exhibitors, and staff to:

- Provide proof of vaccination. A negative COVID test will not be accepted in lieu of proof of vaccination.
- Wear a face mask that completely covers the mouth and nose at all times in public spaces, except when actively eating or drinking.
- Wear the Summit badge throughout the event.

Participants must bring proof of full COVID-19 vaccination (physical card or photo of card) as well as a photo ID (driver's license or passport) when traveling to Summit. For this event, "full COVID-19 vaccination" is defined as one shot of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine or two shots of the Moderna, Pfizer, or Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccines, preferably with a booster, if applicable. Proof of vaccination is required for entry to all restaurants and bars in Chicago and suburban Cook County, including the hotel restaurants, per current Chicago/ Cook County Health Order. ■

For full conference details and COVID-19 guidelines, visit **https://www.summit.stc.org**

Keynote Speakers

16 May, **Margot Bloomstein** opens Summit with "Trustworthy: How to Foster Trust in a Brand Through Better Content." Learn how content professionals can lead the way in regaining trust from consumers!

18 May, **Amber Naslund** closes with "The Courageous Career: Navigate Work Trauma, Unconventional Experience, and Self-Doubt to Reclaim Your Professional Purpose." Explore the ins and outs of career fears and reframe them, so you can create and thrive.

Explore Rosemont and Chicago

BY ROBERT DELWOOD | Senior STC Member

The STC Chicago chapter welcomes you to Chicago for the 2022 Technical Communication Summit. Drop by the welcome desk to meet any of the chapter's members. Chicago is an exciting city with plenty to do and see. Actually, so much to do and see that a few paragraphs and suggestions hardly begin to cover the area or the events. We encourage you to come early or to stay afterwards a couple of days to take advantage of the sights. There is plenty of information available on the internet about the city. Even asking around for locals' favorite places to eat will certainly get an excited reaction. The following is a brief overview of some of the activities.

Around the Convention Center

The Summit is held in Rosemont, Illinois. Rosemont is well-positioned for large conventions. The Parkway Bank Park Entertainment District is the most noticeable attraction. Two blocks away from the Hyatt Regency, the district includes 15 dining and entertainment venues. These include upscale international cuisine, casual dining, perfect for groups, live music and comedy, films, indoor skydiving, and bowling. Favorites tend to be the Five Roses Pub, Adobe Gila's, Zanies Comedy Club, and the Sugar Factory for snacking highs. Stroll around the great lawn for a variety of events including an outdoor ice rink, concerts, and festivals.

Downtown Chicago

Rosemont is about 15 miles from downtown Chicago. Driving in Chicago is a maddening affair, so we recommend taking the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) commuter trains. Chicago is famous for them. The convention area is served by the Blue Line. Many Summit attendees would already be familiar with this, as they took it from the O'Hare Airport, one stop to the west. To the east are all stops Chicago.

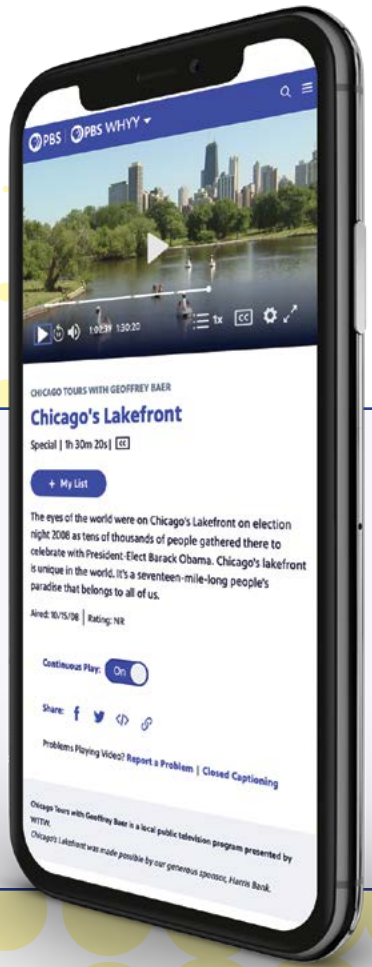
Rosemont station is within walking distance of the Hyatt. Tickets and passes may be purchased any station. Each boarding is $2.50. Popular options are the one- and three-day passes for unlimited boardings, for $10 and $20 respectively, starting from the time you first use the pass. Trains arrive regularly, about every 10 minutes. The trip to downtown Chicago takes about 45 to 55 minutes. They are not crowded other than during rush hours.

Most stops before downtown are neighborhoods, although three are worth mentioning: Logan Square, California, and Damen. These stops are charming pedestrian areas replete with restaurants, bouquet shopping, and strolling opportunities. For example, a Chicago favorite is Stan's Donuts, literally adjacent to the Damen station, and allows for a quick, delicious, and decadent stop along the way.

Downtown Chicago will be the goal for most visitors. Planning a trip downtown requires little more than an Internet search, perhaps for a cuisine type, shopping, or public attractions. The El (or elevated as it's called when downtown) enters an area called The Loop, as the CTA forms a circle, or loop, around it, although most of the Blue Line is underground at this point. Downtown is suited for walking. The copious number of people add a feeling of safety. There are no bad restaurants or pubs. Every level of experience, price, and ethnic offering is available from Americana, Italian, Greek, Polish, Russian, to Mexican. Little Italy, Greektown, and Chinatown are each further south, and not in The Loop but worth the additional effort.

An important Blue Line stop is Washington. To the south, or right as you get off the El, is Michigan Avenue. The Magnificent Mile (three blocks away) is known for its high-end stores, window shopping, and specialized boutiques. Millennium Park has the Bean, an iconic reflective sculpture. That area, more generally known as Grant Park, is Chicago's treasured greenway. It contains two miles of lake-front trails, interesting art, and tree-lined pathways. To the north is the Navy Pier, a jetty into the lake with stores, restaurants, and rides, although it's a mile and half away. Coffee lovers will want to see Starbucks' largest store, the Roastery, a dazzling five-story building.

The Monroe stop gets closer the Museum district of Grant Park, including the Museum of Science and Industry, the Field Museum, the Shedd Aquarium, the Alder Planetarium, the Art Institute of Chicago, and Soldier Field, where the Chicago Bears play. ■


PBS
PBS WHYY
CHICAGO TOURS WITH GEOFFREY BAER
Chicago's Lakefront
Special | 1h 30m 20s
+ My List
The eyes of the world were on Chicago's Lakefront on election night 2008 as tens of thousands of people gathered there to celebrate with President-Elect Barack Obama. Chicago's lakefront is unique in the world. It's a seventeen-mile-long people's paradise that belongs to all of us.
Aired: 10/15/08 | Rating: NR
Continuous Play:
On
Share:
Problems Playing Video? Report a Problem | Closed Captioning

For a video tour, see Geoffrey Baer's *Chicago by El* series found on YouTube. Baer is a popular local PBS host for all things Chicago.

https://www.pbs.org/show/geoffrey-baer-tours/

Chicago's Lakefront

https://www.pbs.org/video/geoffrey-baer-tours-chicagos-lakefront-with-geoffrey-baer/.

Time Stamps
Little Italy, 52:56
Logan Square, 59:58
Rosemont, 1:02:30

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION 2022 SUMMIT CONFERENCE & EXPO

Summit Good Eats

Can't-miss Chicago eateries

Chicago. Food. Those two words together are sure to bring to mind two iconic foods: the Chicago-style hot dog and Chicago-style deep-dish pizza. You might find these foods in other cities, but they started in Chicago — right next door to Rosemont, Illinois, home of Summit 2022.

The base of the Chicago-style hot dog is an all-beef frank nestled in a steamed poppy seed bun. To meet the criteria for "Chicago-style," the dog must be topped with yellow mustard, bright green relish, fresh chopped onions, juicy red tomato wedges, a kosher-style pickle spear, spicy sport peppers, and a dash of celery salt. The toppings and their order are critical to making this culinary delight.

The other iconic dish linked to Chicago is the Chicago-style deep-dish pizza. Don't be fooled by the name. This pizza is more than just a thick crust. To begin, a deep pan is used to frame a crust with deep sides. The crust itself is typically thin to medium in thickness and covers the bottom and sides of the pan. The "deep" part applies to the layers of toppings that are piled onto the crust. While traditional pizza has the cheese on the top, Chicago-style has the cheese directly on the bottom crust. Layers of meat, vegetables and other toppings are stacked on top of the cheese. The pizza is typically topped with an uncooked, chunky tomato sauce. This gooey goodness is sure to satisfy the heartiest of appetites.

Inside the Hotel

Of course, Rosemont offers more food options than just Chicago-style hot dogs and deep-dish pizzas. For your greatest convenience, the Hyatt Regency O'Hare Chicago, where the Summit is located, offers three options to meet a variety of dining needs.

Perks & Perks To-Go: For something small or a quick grab 'n' go meal, stop at Perks to get a drink, snack, quick breakfast (including cereal, bagels, muffins, and French toast), or a small meal (salads, wraps, burgers, and more). The full menu is available at https://www.hyatt.com/en-US/hotel/illinois/hyatt-regency-ohare/chiro/dining.

O'H American Grill: If you have time to sit down and enjoy a fuller meal, the O'H American Grill fits the bill. The Grill offers an expansive breakfast buffet as well as a variety of lunches and dinners featuring locally sourced ingredients.

Red Bar & Lounge: Ready to unwind with an adult beverage paired with comfort food? Stop at the Red Bar & Lounge, where you can enjoy pub fare and appetizers, among other menu options. The bar offers a variety of mixed drinks along with local craft brews. Among the choices is the Red Bar Brew, which they describe as "a deep amber ale with a toasty and sweet caramel start."

Other Local Dining

If you want to step outside the hotel but not go too far away, head toward the Parkway Bank Park Entertainment District. It's less than a mile from the Hyatt Regency and has a variety of options sure to satisfy your taste buds. Here's a small sampling of what you can find close by:

- **Adobe Gila's**
  Mexican-American food
  https://www.dobegilas.com
- **Bub City**
  BBQ and a wide whiskey selection
  https://www.bub-city.com

- **Five Roses Pub**
  Traditional Irish food
  https://www.fiverosespub.com
- **Fogo de Chão**
  Brazilian steak house
  https://www.fogodechao.com/location/rosemont/
- **Park Tavern**
  Burgers, sandwiches, pub food, and craft beer
  https://www.parktavernrosemont.com
- **Murray Bros. Caddyshack**
  Movie- and golf-themed casual dining
  https://www.mbcshack.com/location/rosemont/
- **Morton's The Steakhouse**
  Upscale and comfortable steak house classics
  https://www.mortons.com

If you're looking for a bit of a food adventure, you might want to head into Chicago to visit one of the many restaurants that top the lists of some of Food Network's favorite hosts and judges. You might find a Chicago culinary classic at one of these venues.

For details and additional restaurants recommended by Food Network personalities, visit Food Network Best Restaurants in Chicago at https://www.foodnetwork.com/restaurants/photos/restaurant-guide-chicago.

As you can see, there is no way to provide a comprehensive list of food options in Rosemont or Chicago. Both cities have options to delight any appetite.

Dining during COVID-19 can look a little different, and guidelines/restrictions will shift as conditions change. Be prepared by bringing your mask, your COVID-19 vaccination card (either the card or a photo of the card), and your photo ID. When heading out, plan ahead by checking the restaurant's website for updated guidelines and any reservation requirements.

Also, keep an eye on the final list of events to see what other gatherings the STC Chicago chapter will host.

Expand your knowledge, make connections, and have some good eats during the 2022 Summit. ■

RESTAURANT	KNOWN FOR	FOOD NETWORK HOST/JUDGE
Lou Malnati's	Deep-dish pizza	Alex Guarnaschelli
The Wiener's Circle	Chicago-style char dog	Ted Allen
Au Cheval	Double cheeseburger	Sunny Anderson and Geoffrey Zakarian
Chicago Pizza and Oven Grinder Co.	Pizza pot pie	Marc Murphy
Cemitas Puebla	Sandwiches	Guy Fieri
Manny's Cafeteria & Delicatessen	Corned beef	Jeff Mauro
The Signature Room at the 95th	Roasted Amish chicken	Giada De Laurentiis
Frontera Grill	A variety of items	Geoffrey Zakarian, Marc Murphy, and Alex Guarnaschelli

STC's Salary Database is Live!

Did you know about the STC Salary Database? STC offers members data and insights on demand for technical writers across the U.S.

The Salary Database is a valuable tool for:

- An employee looking for solid facts to back up a raise request.
- A manager seeking salary figures to assist with setting budgets or bidding for projects.
- A freelancer investigating average hourly fees for a different industry or city.
- A job-seeker needing insight on what industries and what geographic areas hold the most new jobs.
- Any technical communicator in need of either annual or hourly wage information.

STC's Salary Database draws from the BLS Occupational Employment Statistics — one of the most referenced wage guides by human resource professionals. STC members who use the database will benefit from the same market intelligence that is relied upon when employers evaluate raises and make salary offers to new hires. ■

For more information and to access the Salary Database, visit **https://www.stc.org/publications/salary-database**

Announcing 2022 STC Elections

President

- Aiessa Moyna will automatically succeed from the office of Vice President.

Vice President
(One candidate for one position; three-year commitment)

- Timothy Esposito

Secretary
(Two candidates for one position; two-year term)

- Li-At Rathbun
- Paula Robertson

Treasurer
(two-year term)

- No elections for treasurer this year

Director
(Two candidates for two positions; two-year term)

- Lori Meyer
- Danielle Villegas

Nominating Committee
(Three candidates for two positions; two-year term)

- Shayla Corprew
- Kylie Jacobsen
- Mirhonda Studevant

Congratulations to the candidates listed above, and thanks to all STC members who expressed interest in running for office!

Elections begin 7 March 2022 and close 18 March 2022.

Advancing Your Tech Comm Career

BY JACK MOLISANI | STC Fellow

In my article, "How to Beat the Dreaded Applicant Tracking System" (*Intercom,* January 2022), I mentioned the biggest obstacles job seekers face in looking for work is they can't get past automated applicant tracking systems — even if they are highly qualified for the positions.

The solution to that problem? Stop applying for jobs through applicant tracking systems! Expand your professional network and get a personal referral when interested in a job. That advice has survived the test of time and still stands.

In this column, I want to offer some additional advice on how to get your next job and share ideas on how to proactively advance your career.

Be Creative

I entered the field of technical communication when the publishing paradigm shifted form printed manuals to online help.

The two most popular help authoring tools at the time were Doc-To-Help and RoboHelp. I wanted to learn the tools but didn't have the money to buy them, so I reached out to both companies and offered to write a review for my STC chapter newsletter if they could send me a complimentary copy. They both did.

I learned the tools and wrote the reviews as promised. But I also created samples in my portfolio that landed me my first online help writing contract!

I also loved Doc-To-Help so much I went on to become a certified Doc-to-Help consultant and positioned myself as an online help expert — all because I offered to write a review for my STC newsletter!

(More on positioning yourself as an expert in my next column.)

For now, let's look at a few more examples of using creativity when looking for work.

Market Research

I enjoyed being a contract technical writer more than a captive employee, so I was always looking for my next writing gig.

I'm far more of a fan of *making* opportunities than *waiting* for opportunities, so I made a list of the top 10 Orange County companies where I'd like to work. I then contacted the documentation managers at each of the companies and said, "I'm writing an article for my STC newsletter on hiring trends in Orange County. May I interview you for the article?"

Each replied with an enthusiastic, "Yes!"

> **I'm far more of a fan of *making* opportunities than *waiting* for opportunities . . .**

I asked questions such as, "Do you plan on hiring more technical writers over the next six months? "If yes, contract or permanent?"; "What qualities do you look for in a tech writer?"; "Which authoring tools do you use here?"; and so on.

I ended with, "Would you like to receive a copy of the article when it comes out? . . . Great! What's your email address?"

I then knew *exactly* who was going to be hiring, when they would be hiring, what skills they valued, and what tools to learn (if I didn't already know them).

I was also now on a first-name basis with the very managers who would be doing the hiring!

I wrote the article as promised and sent each of the managers a copy, but I also added, "By the way, my contract at XYZ Company is ending soon. May I send a copy of *my* résumé?"

It worked! I landed a six-month contract at one of the companies. Soon after, I started my own outsource writing company, but I stayed in contact with those hiring managers — and received paying work for years after.

Another Example

Brian McCaleb of the Orange County Chapter specializes in writing marketing documentation. Instead of waiting for a job to be posted somewhere and applying for it, Brian would visit every trade show held at the Orange County Convention Center.

He would walk the exhibit floor, looking for which vendors had the best marketing collateral. He would then circle back to the bad vendors and say, "The marketing materials in your competitor's booth over there are so much better than yours. I can help you fix that!" — and then left his business card.

I don't recall ever seeing Brian unemployed in the decades I've known him.

A Final Tip

It takes courage to call someone out of the blue and ask to interview them, or to walk up to someone at a trade show and introduce yourself. But like any skill, it gets easier the more you practice.

I recommend taking an improv comedy workshop (MaryKay Grueneberg and I are teaching one at the Summit in May). Toastmasters International is also a great place to practice and boost your self-confidence.

> **It takes courage to call someone out of the blue and ask to interview them, or to walk up to someone at a trade show and introduce yourself. But like any skill, it gets easier the more you practice.**

Take a chance.

Make a call.

Create opportunities! ■

JACK MOLISANI is the president of ProSpring Technical Staffing, an employment agency specializing in tech comm professionals: http://www.ProSpringStaffing.com. Jack is also the author of *Be the Captain of Your Career: A New Approach to Career Planning and Advancement*, which hit #5 on Amazon's Career and Resume Best Sellers list. Connect with Jack on LinkedIn, https://www.linkedin.com/in/jackmolisani/, and follow him on Twitter, @JackMolisani.

Humanize Accessibility in Your Organization

RUSSELL WILLERTON | STC Member

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected almost every part of work and life over the past two years. Activities that we once completed without much thought — going to the grocery store, grabbing a bite at a local café, going to school or sporting events — suddenly became opportunities to catch a potentially dangerous virus.

There was a lot we did not know about the virus early in the pandemic. Early on, the best way for people to greatly reduce their risk of exposure to the virus was to limit their contacts with others. Over time, we learned more about ways to prevent the spread of the virus. Eventually, vaccines provided some protection for those who received them. But we know dangers persist with the ongoing presence of the virus.

Businesses and organizations who make money from face-to-face activities had to adapt to the new environment. Schools were forced to *pivot* to online teaching in most classes. Some restaurants pivoted from in-person dining to serving takeout. Musicians and singers gave performances online from their living rooms instead of crowded concert venues. Some stores offered online ordering and curbside pickup.

This pandemic has provided many opportunities for us to think again about access and accessibility. *Access* is a means of approach, or the ability to use something or approach someone. *Accessibility* is the quality of being usable or approachable, or the quality of being usable by someone with a disability. We frequently evaluate the accessibility of websites as the degree to which they work with adaptive technologies like screen readers. Section 508 of the

Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which has been amended over time, requires federal agencies to ensure that their technological systems (such as websites) are accessible to people with disabilities.

> **Even without laws requiring that systems must be accessible, I think it is ethical for organizations to ensure that their goods and services are widely accessible.**

Access and accessibility vary according to the situations that people face. The grocery store, school, or community center down the road that is normally accessible becomes less accessible to a person whose body cannot fight infections well. The online class session replacing in-person learning may be less accessible to people with impaired hearing or learning disabilities. Any activity may be less accessible to those enduring the ongoing effects of the pandemic — depression, fatigue, malaise — if not those effects of the virus itself.

The COVID-19 pandemic reminds us that a person's disabilities are not always on display in ways that others notice. The pandemic has also reminded us that a person's abilities may change with their circumstances. A person dealing with fatigue or memory loss might use captions on videos even without the challenge of a hearing impairment. A person who is worried or depressed over fears of catching or spreading COVID-19 might struggle reading materials that are not presented in plain language.

The human cost of the pandemic has been high. How many of us have missed seeing friends, coworkers, mentors, or family members? How many occasions ordinarily marked in the company of family and friends took place at home, in sparse outdoor settings, or online? How many of us remember someone who is gone too soon because of the virus?

Even without laws requiring that systems must be accessible, I think it is ethical for organizations to ensure that their goods and services are widely accessible. I think it is ethical for organizations to not only be aware of the barriers their customers and constituents face but to remove those barriers whenever possible.

Humanizing accessibility involves moving away from abstract platitudes about accessibility and instead moving toward specific solutions that help people. The U.S. General Services Administration's *Accessibility for Teams*[1] website provides some specific suggestions for incorporating accessibility into UX design. These include covering accessibility and inclusive design[2] issues when conducting user research, incorporating accessibility concerns in user personas or user stories, using assistive technology to see how others access a website, and including users with disabilities in user research.[3]

That said, humanizing accessibility involves much more than following a set of steps during product development.

Humanizing accessibility means that you treat your users with respect. It means that you view their problems not as burdens you must bear, but rather opportunities for you to help solve problems and produce meaningful results. It means that you seek to partner in your users' successes rather than simply sell them another product or check a box in a list of requirements. A number of authors in technical communication have used the dialogic view of ethics as a means to humanize the relationship between those who provide goods or services and those who use them. Willerton's *Plain Language and Ethical Action*[4] provides a summary in the second chapter.

By humanizing accessibility when designing goods and services, organizations can pursue ethical goals while also seeking to serve new clients and constituents. ■

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RUSSELL WILLERTON is chair of the Department of Writing and Linguistics at Georgia Southern University. Send comments or questions about this column to russell.willerton@gmail.com.

Committee Involvement

BY KIRSTY TAYLOR | STC President

One of the most common ways the STC Board and staff seek volunteer help with the activities of the Society is through participation in various committees. Committee involvement is a great opportunity for professional development as well as a way to give back to the profession. I'm going to use committee as a general term to include committees, task forces, and advisory panels.

> **Participating in committees, either as a committee member or as the chair, is a great way to help STC with your skills and knowledge.**

Each year, the new president is responsible for seeking volunteers and nominating chairs of most of the committees, which the Board then reviews and considers approving. Aiessa Moyna, who will be assuming the role of president in May, has begun her search for volunteers to ensure that all committees will be fully staffed and ready to work at the start of the new board year in June.

There are three types of committees in STC: bylaw committees, board committees, and staff committees. Some committees, such as the Nominating Committee, are governed by STC's bylaws, which might state specific requirements for the chair or committee members. Other committees, such as the Distinguished Community Service Award (DCSA) Committee, are general board committees whose members serve at the will of the Board. Other options include staff committees, which the STC staff convene (the Membership Marketing Committee is an STC staff committee), or the advisory panels for STC publications, which the publication editors are responsible for.

This year, we've been reviewing the charters and templates for the STC Committees. Sometimes, the nature of a particular committee can change — for example, when STC had a staff member who was director of education, the Education Committee was an advisory committee. Now the Education Committee is responsible for STC's education calendar and activities (excluding the Summit).

Participating in committees, either as a committee member or as the chair, is a great way to help STC with your skills and knowledge. In seeking committee chairs for my presidential year, I tried to find some different members to be involved and I encouraged new participants on committees. We like to see a blend of new faces and returning volunteers; the combination helps to maintain momentum without a gap as the STC president and new Board change over.

> **We like to see a blend of new faces and returning volunteers; the combination helps to maintain momentum without a gap as the STC president and new Board change over.**

If you're interested in serving, potentially chairing a committee, or simply learning more, please get in touch with me or our 2022 incoming president, Aiessa Moyna (amoyna.stc@gmail.com). ■

KIRSTY TAYLOR (ktaylor.stc@gmail.com) is the 2021-2022 president of STC. Her recurring column will provide updates and insights on Board activities and solicit member feedback to guide ongoing decision-making.

Help Me Learn: Blogging for STC NYC

BY MATT MILSOP | STC Member

My blogging started because I had no idea what to do.

After years of effort and countless applications, I had finally gotten a real technical communication job. But I had no idea how to proceed. I wanted to stay ahead of the proverbial curve, see the tends as they were coming, learn what I could do with this, and develop myself appropriately. Not knowing where to go, I contacted TJ Cardenas, NY Metro Chapter STC president, to bounce some ideas around and get some information.

I wanted to eventually go into contract technical communication work. TJ had said the best way to get leads for that kind of work was to network. The best way to network was to volunteer, and NY Metro needed content for its page. He saw I had done a bit of blogging and journalism, so the work of interviewing people seemed like the natural direction to head. It also allowed me to continue to make connections, even during the isolation of the pandemic.

The grand irony is I struggle with anxiety issues. Yet when I worked for a local newspaper here in northern New Jersey, I found I really enjoyed interviewing people. It only seemed logical I would do that with this blog. It would be a great way to not only help myself learn more about technical communication but also to build name recognition by sharing that experience with others.

> **Blogging has been a great opportunity to meet new people, learn about technical communication careers, and build my professional network.**

I began to collect names, learn what I could about the interviewees, and build questions around that. I kept it simple. Who were they and why did they choose to get into this? I dug a little deeper on their backgrounds and experiences. Soon I wanted to add a little more life to the process, so I began to ask about favorite projects or nightmare projects. I had topics I wanted to learn more about, and if they specialized in those areas, I would ask them. There are more potential stories in those interviews — stories I could come back to and explore.

I take on topics that interest me and I feel would make a good story. For example, I am very curious about artificial intelligence. What is it, really? How far can we go with it? If you read the news meant for the general population, you might think artificial intelligence will be replacing all of humanity in a few short years. The world will either be a paradise, or everyone will be poor and destitute. I want to understand how we can grow with it. How can we, as technical communicators, utilize it? How will we use it to communicate complex ideas to those who have no training? How can we use it to create?

Blogging has been a great opportunity to meet new people, learn about technical communication careers, and build my professional network. If you'd like to learn more about starting your own chapter blog, please contact me at my email address below. ■

You can read Matt's interviews on the STC NY Metro website, **https://www.sites.google.com/site/stcnychapter/home.**

MATT MILSOP (matthewmilsop.writer@yahoo.com) is a technical writer based in New Jersey. He enjoys writing and reading about history, technology, and psychology. He is open to freelance writing opportunities.

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